

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A FECAL OCCULT BLOOD TEST (FOBT)

The Basics

A Fecal Occult Blood Test or FOBT is a test to see if there is blood in your bowel movements (stool). Sometimes blood is hidden, and you will not see a red color in or on your stool. Many things can cause blood in your stool, including colorectal cancer.

The FOBT can also let your health care provider know that there may be bleeding in your colon (large intestine or large bowel). Bleeding may come from polyps (growths on the lining of your colon). You can perform a FOBT yourself at home with a kit that you can get from your health care provider.

Before the Test

Seven days before you take the FOBT, you will need to tell your health care provider what medications you take. You may have to stop taking these medications on the days that you are taking the test. Some medications, such as anti-inflammatory drugs and pain relievers like ibuprofen, Motrin or aspirin and blood thinners, and even some vitamins, can change the results of the test.

Three days before the test, your health care provider will ask you not to eat certain foods: red or rare meat, cantaloupe, radishes, horse radish, raw beets, turnips, broccoli, cauliflower and parsnips. You will not be able to eat these foods until you have finished the test.

During the Test

During the test, you will take samples of your stool from three bowel movements and put them on the special area provided on a card in the kit your health care provider has given you.

Some kits contain wooden sticks or other devices to collect stool. During the days that you are collecting stool, do not use any cleansers or deodorizers in your toilet bowl and tank. If you use colored cleansers in your toilet bowl, flush the toilet until the water is clear.

Collecting Stool

You will be asked to collect stool samples from three different bowel movements. There are several ways to collect stool:

1. You may scoop the stool sample out of the toilet bowl with a paper cup or plastic spoon.
2. You may collect the stool sample by putting a paper cup under your rectum while you move your bowels.
3. You may use a piece of plastic wrap or a paper plate over the bowl to catch the stool. Do not flush these down the toilet.
4. You may use collection tissue that may be provided in your FOBT kit. Unfold the tissue and float in on the top of the water in your toilet bowl. Let your stool fall on this tissue. Take a stool sample off the tissue with a paper cup or plastic gloves. Flush the tissue down the toilet after you take the sample.

Placing the Stool on the Slides

Take two samples from each bowel movement. Use one end of the wooden stick to take a small sample from the outside of the stool. Put a thin amount of this on the area on the card marked A.

Use the other end of the stick to take a small sample from the inside of the stool. Place a thin amount of this on the area on the card marked B. Close the cover over the area and label it with the date you took the sample. Put this into the envelope that is in the kit. Keep it away from heat, sun, light, and household items like iodine, bleach and cleaners.

Put all the supplies you use to collect samples in a plastic bag with a twist tie and throw it away.

After the Test

After you have put stool samples on all the slides in your kit, return the FOBT in it's envelop to your health care provider or the laboratory, according to the instructions. Ask your health care provider for the results. If your test is positive for blood in your stool, you will need to have follow-up tests.



March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, funded by the Cancer Research Foundation of America in collaboration with many partner organizations. Talk with your health care provider about colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer is preventable, and is easy to treat and often curable when detected early. Ask your health care provider what kind of screening test you should have and when.